

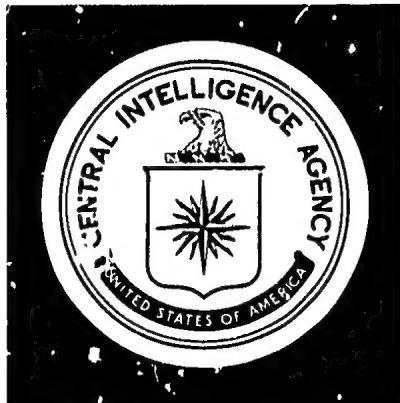
Sanitized Copy Approved for 1
Release 2010/09/10 : CIA-RDP85T00875R001100130

Sanitized Copy Approved for
Release 2010/09/10 : CIA-RDP85T00875R001100130

25X1

Secret

DPSD



**DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE**

Intelligence Memorandum

Shelest Revisited

**CIA
DOCUMENT SERVICES BRANCH
FILE COPY
DO NOT DESTROY**

Secret

89

1 July 1972
No. 2049/72

Page Denied

SECRET

25X1

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
1 July 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Shelest Revisited

The substitution of Shcherbitsky for Shelest as First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party and the downgrading of the latter to one of nine USSR deputy premiers was the most important political change in the Soviet Union in at least five years and provided a dramatic display of Brezhnev's power on the eve of the Summit. Even more than the removal of Voronov as chairman of the Russian Republic last July, the demotion of Shelest represents a victory for Brezhnev personally and a blow to his opponents, though not a fatal one. Shelest remains on the politburo at least for the time being.

Shelest had long been engaged in a struggle with Brezhnev and his Ukrainian proteges for control of the important Ukrainian party organization. In recent years this political rivalry was increasingly marked by policy disputes and, with the eclipse of Brezhnev's other powerful rivals such as Shelepin, Shelest emerged as the chief spokesman for critics of the General Secretary. Using the public platform afforded him as a regional party boss, Shelest repeatedly registered views seemingly at variance with those espoused by Brezhnev and the majority of his politburo colleagues on an array of issues: cultural policy, the nationality issue, economic priorities, but most important, foreign policy. Shelest has had a reputation as the leading hard-line conservative in the politburo since the Czechoslovak

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of Economic Research and the Office of National Estimates.

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

crisis in 1968, when by all accounts he was the most vociferous advocate within the politburo of a military solution. In more recent years as Brezhnev became increasingly committed to a policy of rapprochement with West Germany, to working out a SALT agreement, and to a general detente policy with the West, the breach between them widened noticeably.

While it had been clear at least since the 24th Party Congress in the spring of 1971 that Brezhnev was maneuvering to oust Shelest from his power base in the Ukraine and that some kind of showdown could not be avoided indefinitely, the denouement, when it came, was unexpected and surprisingly swift. There is still no solid evidence as to what finally brought matters to a head, but there were rumors in Moscow that following President Nixon's speech on 8 May announcing US plans to step up military pressure on Hanoi, Shelest was one of those who argued against going ahead with the Summit meeting. The timing of the announcement of Shelest's demotion on 21 May, just one day before President Nixon's arrival, strongly suggests that this was indeed the case. Regardless of the weight that other issues, particularly domestic ones, undoubtedly played in the decision, Shelest's demotion is certainly being read by the party rank and file as signaling a victory for Brezhnev and the forces favoring detente. As for Shelest, in his new position he will now be seen a great deal in public in Moscow, but not heard.

-2-

SECRET

25X1

Soviet Leadership

PARTY

POLITBURO OF CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Members

BREZHNEV

PODGORNY

KOSYGIN

SUSLOV

KIRILENKO

PELSHE

MAZUROV

POLYANSKY

SHELEST (party boss in Ukraine)

VORONOV

SECRETARIAT OF CENTRAL COMMITTEE

General Secretary

BREZHNEV

SUSLOV (ideology, non-ruling CPs)
KIRILENKO (Brezhnev's unofficial deputy,
plus heavy industry)
Party Control
Committee Chairman
PELSHE

MAZUROV

POLYANSKY

SHELEST

VORONOV

KULAKOV (agriculture)

ANDROPOV

USTINOV

DEMICHIEV

PONOMAREV

SOLOMENTSEV

MASHEROV

RASHIDOV

MZHAVANADZE (party boss of Georgia)

GOVERNMENT

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

Presidium Chairman

KOSYGIN

First Deputy Chairman

MAZUROV (industry)

POLYANSKY (agriculture)

Deputy Chairman (9) (9)

SHELEST

Members (85 including

the 15 Republic Premiers)

SHCHERBITSKY (Premier of Ukraine)

SOLOMENTSEV (Premier of RSFSR)

ANDROPOV (KGB-security & intelligence)

VORONOV (Chairman, Peoples

Control Committee)

PRESIDIUM OF SUPREME SOVIET

Chairman (Titular Chief of State)

PODGORNY

Deputy Chairmen

(The Chairmen of the Supreme Soviet
Presidiums of the 15 Republics)

Secretary

Members

BREZHNEV

SHELEST

GRISHIN

KUNAYEV

MASHEROV

RASHIDOV

SECRET

25X1

History of the Conflict

1. The conflict between Shelest and Brezhnev is rooted in Ukrainian politics, where traditional factionalism has been exacerbated by the presence in Moscow of many former Ukrainian officials who continue to meddle in Ukrainian affairs. Brezhnev, though not of Ukrainian parents, was born and made his career in the industrial area of Dnepropetrovsk in the Southern Ukraine. He headed the party organization in Dnepropetrovsk for years and, since attaining high position in Moscow, has been a patron for officials from that area. He has been particularly warm in his support of the new Ukrainian party boss, Shcherbitsky, a fellow party official from Dnepropetrovsk.

2. Shelest, on the other hand, got his start in the Kharkov party organization, long a rival of the Dnepropetrovsk faction. President Podgorny was once a patron of the Kharkov group, which was badly hurt in the campaign against Podgorny after Khrushchev's ouster and no longer had much political clout. As a result, Shelest had to look elsewhere in the republic for political support. He fixed on the Donetsk party organization. The Donetsk is an important coal mining area, and its party organization has emerged as a new force in Ukrainian politics. Shelest successfully sidetracked Lyashko, the leader of the Donetsk faction, two years ago and then went to work to ingratiate himself with local party functionaries there. In a fitting turn of events, Lyashko has now returned to a powerful position in the Ukraine, succeeding Shcherbitsky in the post of premier.

3. In the rest of the republic, Shelest sought to buttress his position by a subtle appeal to Ukrainian nationalist sentiment, in contrast to the more Moscow-oriented policies of the Dnepropetrovsk group. He was tolerant of Ukrainian nationalist writers and promoted a policy of gradual, limited, and controlled Ukrainianization of the cultural and economic life of the republic. He seems to have tried to use the support that this brought him from lower party and government officials, particularly

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

in the nationality-conscious western areas, to gain for himself a measure of independence from Moscow. It was at best a risky game.

4. Shelest also consistently showed an interest in any administrative reforms that would bring about some devolution of authority from Moscow to the republic level and thus increase his own power. On other subjects, Shelest was a thorough conservative. His long association in the past with the defense industries made him a spokesman for this special interest group and a champion of defense spending in general. He usually took a hard line on foreign-policy questions, and was particularly concerned about the cohesion of the East European bloc.

5. Rivalry between Shelest, on the one hand, and Brezhnev and his protege, Shcherbitsky, on the other, was more or less submerged during the years that Brezhnev was struggling against Shelepin. Brezhnev may have seen a need for Shelest's support (or neutralism) in those years, and the Ukrainian party boss' orthodox views were generally in vogue in Brezhnev's circle then.

Brezhnev's Response to Challenge

6. In the early days of this collective leadership, the principal challenge to Brezhnev came from the ambitious Shelepin, who spoke for neo-Stalinism and rode the wave of reaction against Khrushchev. Brezhnev, in classic political style, moved with the flow of conservatism to limit the ground available to Shelepin, while at the same time undermining Shelepin's political base. By late 1967, Brezhnev had control over the conservative wing of the party and Shelepin, though still a member of the politburo, had been relieved of his other party posts and had been reduced to the politically powerless post of trade unions' chief.

7. Shelepin evidently was forced to look elsewhere for new constituents, new issues, and a new image. Because of expediency, or a change of heart, he gravitated toward what we call the

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

"moderates"--Kosygin, Mazurov and Voronov. While there are many differences among them and they clearly never acted as a faction or bloc, they appear to hold certain views in common--in particular, an interest in modern methods of management and in economic efficiency. They also share a deep hostility toward the agricultural lobby represented by Polyansky. Kosygin and Shelepin are both known to be advocates of consumer needs. Possibly most important, these men are "outsiders"; they do not belong to the Ukrainian coterie around Brezhnev. Suslov, another "outsider," has on occasion joined them on certain issues.

8. On foreign policy questions, Kosygin has long been identified with a desire for a slackening of international tensions. Suslov had provided the theoretical rationale for a positive response to Brandt's Ostpolitik a full six months before Brandt himself came to power, and there were hints of a similar receptivity to Ostpolitik in some of Shelepin's trade union activities.

9. In late 1969 there were reliable reports that Brezhnev was under fire from Suslov, Shelepin, and Mazurov for his lack of dynamism and a tendency to tread water on policy issues. His efforts to increase the cohesion of the Communist world were frustrated, and the stalemate in relations with Communist China persisted. Brezhnev needed an opening for fresh initiatives, and Brandt's election as West German Chancellor provided new opportunities in the foreign policy field. Criticized for a lack of dynamism, Brezhnev resorted to the tactic that had served him in the past--adopting the platform of his critics, while undercutting their political positions. In the following months signs of a new activist Brezhnev began to appear.

10. Brezhnev first seemed to move to secure the support of his conservative colleagues on the politburo, most notably Polyansky and Shelest, by supporting a costly agricultural investment program which they favored. In July 1970 he nailed down agriculture's share of investments in the 1971-75 economic plan, long before work on other sections of the plan was completed. Having secured his right flank,

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

Brezhnev started to change course by espousing a policy of detente and by promising new attention to consumer interests. Brezhnev was, of course, to some extent responding to particular long-term needs and interests of the USSR in the domestic field and in its relations with the outside world; particularly Europe, the US, and Communist China. Brezhnev's espousal of peace abroad and butter at home, however, stood in contrast to his previous caution and orthodoxy, and reflected a willingness on his part to incur greater political risks than before.

11. Immediately after the Soviet - West German treaty was signed in the summer of 1970, Brezhnev took the lead in speaking out in favor of normalizing relations with West Germany. At the party congress in the spring of 1971 he put considerable stress on the theme of European detente and peace in general, and followed this up with more specific proposals in a speech in Tbilisi in late May.

12. But until the visit of West German Chancellor Brandt to the Crimea in mid-September 1971, Brezhnev was operating as the spokesman for the collective leadership, and the troika of Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Podgorny continued to share responsibility for the conduct of foreign policy. Brezhnev's solo two-day meeting with Brandt marked a significant departure from this pattern. The visit represented a deliberate move by Brezhnev to establish himself publicly as the architect of detente policy, the one person in the leadership responsible for its conduct, and thus the one to reap the benefits should it succeed.

13. On the domestic front, Brezhnev had for some time championed various measures to raise living standards, but his efforts to satisfy all important interest groups, particularly the military-defense complex, blurred his image. He had made clear his commitment to agriculture in July 1970. In February 1971, the draft five-year plan for 1971-75 was published over his signature, rather than under the auspices of the central committee, as had been customary since Stalin's death, and his identification with consumer interests was underscored.

-6-

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

At the 24th Party Congress in March and April 1971, Brezhnev in his discussion of the draft five-year plan reiterated these positions. The plan highlighted the tasks of raising living standards and aiding the agricultural sector.

14. In economic terms, the attention to consumer goods thus far appears to be in large measure propaganda froth, but in a political sense it is both real and controversial, marking a departure from the long sacrosanct tenet of the primacy of heavy industry over light industry. Moreover, such a change in principle could have important implications for Soviet economic policy over the long run.

Political Impact in the Kremlin

15. Brezhnev's departures in foreign and domestic policy once again cut ground from under his critics and rivals. Shelepin found Brezhnev crowding his political platform. Shelepin managed to hold his position on the politburo at the 24th Party Congress, but dropped in ranking from 6th--the position he held at the previous congress in 1966--to last place. His speeches since the congress suggest that he sees no alternative for the moment but to go along with Brezhnev.

16. Premier Kosygin also suffered a slight loss of status at the congress. He dropped from second to third place, behind President Podgorny. One of the principal spokesmen for closer relations with the West in the past, he has steadily been pushed aside as Brezhnev has moved to assume leadership in this field. Thus, while it was Kosygin who visited England in 1967 and met with President Johnson at Glassboro the same year, in 1971 Brezhnev went to France while Kosygin journeyed to Norway.

17. Suslov came through the 24th Party Congress relatively unscathed, still ranking 4th in the politburo. Mazurov also held his own, despite his reported earlier criticism of Brezhnev's leadership, but there is considerable ambiguity concerning his present loyalties. There were signs beginning in early 1970 that Brezhnev was seeking to

SECRET

25X1

SECRET

25X1

exploit potential differences between the two Belorussians in the leadership--Mazurov and candidate member of the politburo Masherov, who succeeded him as Belorussian party boss when Mazurov moved to his government post in Moscow in 1965. Brezhnev's current emphasis on consumer goods may at least have ensured Mazurov's neutrality.

18. Of the politburo members of a generally moderate persuasion, Voronov suffered the most serious setback. Voronov has long been at odds with two of Brezhnev's political allies. In the past he competed with Kirilenko for political control of party affairs in the RSFSR. More recently, his primary feud has been with Polyansky over agricultural policies. Voronov has advocated reform as an alternative, or at least a corollary, to huge capital investments in the agricultural sector, and he has vigorously campaigned for the adoption of the controversial "link" system of organizing farm labor, a system that smacks of private farming to the ideologically orthodox.

19. In the spring of 1970, Polyansky and Voronov engaged in a bitter public exchange over agricultural policies and the matter was resolved in Polyansky's favor only when Brezhnev moved decisively to give his full backing to the agricultural lobby. Following Voronov's defeat on this issue, his political fortunes began to plummet. Voronov continued, however, to criticize aspects of the agricultural support program, an act that undoubtedly won him Brezhnev's enmity, since the latter's stamp of approval and thus his prestige were now riding on the agricultural program. Although Voronov retained his seat on the Politburo at the 1971 congress, he dropped in ranking from 5th--the position he had held in 1966--to next to the last, ahead only of Shelepin. The following July, Voronov was released as Premier of the Russian Republic and assigned to a politically inconsequential job.

Potential Conservative Backlash

20. Brezhnev was thus able, one way or another, to neutralize his rivals on the more moderate end of the political spectrum. At the same

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

time, the quickening pace of detente began to alarm conservative elements in the country and Brezhnev's increasingly close identification with this policy made him a prime target for their ire.

21. In moving forward on a policy of detente, Brezhnev could feel reasonably confident that he had not left his conservative flank unguarded, however. His past record of orthodoxy and his close ties with important elements in the heavy industry and the military would seem to reduce his vulnerability to criticism from the conservative wing. Furthermore, unlike Khrushchev before him, he has been careful not to combine a policy of detente with any relaxation of internal controls. On the contrary, the authorities have intensified their pursuit of dissident elements.

22. Not only could Brezhnev feel that he had thus somewhat blunted the issue, but he could take comfort in the fact that most of the important spokesmen for conservative causes had either been removed from office before the detente policy got under way or were sufficiently beholden to him politically to ensure their compliance. For example, one of the most influential foreign policy conservatives, Leningrad party boss Tolstikov, was maneuvered into exile as Ambassador to Peking in 1970, before the 24th Party Congress. His successor appears to be somewhat more open to Brezhnev's blandishments, and as a "new boy" carries considerably less weight when he speaks than had Tolstikov.

23. Within Brezhnev's own political circle, Polyansky reportedly sought in the pre-congress period to appeal to hard-line conservatives by supporting their positions on a variety of cultural matters. He is even said to have from time to time flirted with the ultra-conservative neo-Stalinists. But he is indebted to Brezhnev for the latter's support on agricultural policy. Moreover, Polyansky's most visible rival to succeed Kosygin when the premier steps down is Mazurov, whose ties have been with Brezhnev's critics. Polyansky's ambition would seem to be best served by loyalty to Brezhnev. The same holds true for Kirilenko, who displayed a conservative cast of mind during the high-water mark of

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

orthodoxy in the period following the invasion of Czechoslovakia. As Brezhnev's right-hand man, who presumably hopes to be tagged as his eventual successor, here again, loyalty would seem to come first. Whatever unease these "Moscow Ukrainians" may feel concerning a future of detente and butter would to some extent be counterbalanced by the advantages they see in the political slippage of their rivals.

When Ukrainians Fall Out...

24. With these former spokesmen for the conservatives biding their time, at least in public, the field was left to Ukrainian party boss Shelest, who emerged as the principal spokesman for their interests and the noisiest critic of Brezhnev's domestic and foreign policies. Brezhnev, possibly because he had at hand in the Ukraine his own protege who presented an attractive alternative to Shelest, seems to have made little effort to sweeten his new policy tack with any concessions to the Ukrainian party boss.

25. The first breach between the two men came in late 1969 at the collective farmers congress, when Brezhnev reneged on his earlier promise to support one of Shelest's decentralization schemes which would have considerably diminished the authority of Polyansky's agricultural bureaucracy. Not surprisingly, officials in this bureaucracy were dead set against the concept, and in the end Brezhnev bowed to their pressure.

26. Shelest may have been briefly mollified by Brezhnev's decisive stand on agricultural allocations in the spring of 1970, but relations were soon strained again by the signing in August 1970 of the Soviet - West German treaties, and by disagreements over the allocation of resources to other sectors of the economy in the new five-year plan. While there is little evidence of what role Shelest played in debates over the plan, the draft was clearly not arrived at easily. It was not discussed at a party plenum before the party congress, as had been customary, and in February 1971 it was issued over Brezhnev's personal signature, suggesting that unresolved controversies may have necessitated steam-roller tactics to get the document out in time for the congress.

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

27. At the congress the following month, relations between Shelest and Brezhnev came close to an open break. Shelest complained openly that funds earmarked for the Donetsk coal enterprises were insufficient. In part, this complaint was a political gesture designed to curry favor with the Donetsk leadership. (His intercession was gratefully acknowledged by the Donetsk party boss in his subsequent speech at the congress.)

25X1

28. Brezhnev seems to have taken the offensive against Shelest at the congress, and there were clear signs that he was using the nationality issue to this end. Brezhnev's report to the congress contained a wholly unexpected and indeed uncharacteristic paean of praise to the Great Russians, a theme which was picked up by some, but by no means all, subsequent speakers. The close correlation between the regional party leaders who praised the Great Russians and those who had earlier publicly expressed their support for Brezhnev personally left an unmistakable impression of an orchestrated drive against Shelest and other similarly nationalistic-minded or independent local leaders. Brezhnev's own praise of the Great Russians seemed designed not only to isolate Shelest and other independents, but also to allow Brezhnev himself to shed his Ukrainian image. The split between Shelest and Shcherbitsky, the latter serving as a proxy for Brezhnev, was evident. Shcherbitsky stressed that the heroic labor of all the Soviet people formed the basis of Ukrainian success, and added that "great credit" was due to those in Moscow for their unflagging concern for all the republics.

29. Shelest's speech, in contrast, contained no word of thanks to the Great Russians. Instead, he insisted that the shoe was on the other foot--that the Ukraine was responsible for a great part of all-union production. In addition to revealing a strong streak of local pride, Shelest's remarks

-11-

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

were probably intended to reinforce his complaint that under the new plan the Ukraine was asked to contribute more than it received in return. Shelest was joined in his independent stance by the same republic party bosses who before the congress had shown the greatest reluctance to praise Brezhnev personally.

30. Brezhnev emerged from the congress strengthened politically; two reliable proteges, Kunayev in Kazakhstan and Shcherbitsky in the Ukraine, were promoted from candidate to full membership on the politburo. Shelest retained his ranking on the politburo, but his position in the Ukraine was considerably weakened. Officials connected with Dnepropetrovsk were clearly favored over Shelest associates in the elections to the new central committee. The most serious blow to Shelest's position was the elevation of Shcherbitsky. It is very unusual for both top posts in any republic to be represented on the politburo, and the impression was left of an unstable situation in which one or the other would have to go. Moreover, the promotion of Brezhnev's personal protege removed any pretense of neutrality on his part and seemed to eliminate whatever chance there might have been of patching up his differences with Shelest. The breach, if not final, was fully visible.

Thunder on the Right

31. Far from lying low after the congress, Shelest seems to have concluded that his best defense was a good offense. Throughout the summer and fall of 1971, his speeches were punctuated by thinly disguised expressions of dissent from Brezhnev's views on an array of subjects.

32. On economic issues, Shelest throughout this period consistently and, it appears, deliberately ignored or distorted the 24th Party Congress formulation on the tasks of the new five-year plan by downgrading the importance of raising living standards. As formulated in the congress proceedings and heavily stressed by Brezhnev in his report to the congress, the "main task of the plan

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

is to ensure a considerable upsurge in the material and cultural well-being of the people, on the basis of a high rate of development of socialist production and improvement of its efficiency." Shelest variously referred vaguely to a decision "to further strengthen the economic and defense might of the country," put consumer welfare last on his list of priorities, and turned the congress formulation on its ear so that the means--an increase in efficiency and technical innovation--rather than the end--raising the standard of living--became the main task. In sharp contrast to Shelest's studied downgrading of consumer interests, Shcherbitsky warmly endorsed the congress decision and presented the main report to an Ukrainian central committee plenum devoted to discussing measures to increase production of consumer goods.

33. In his speech to the Ukrainian writers union on 19 May 1971, Shelest continued his quiet low-keyed appeal to Ukrainian national pride, deplored the practice of "littering" the Ukrainian language--an obvious reference to borrowing of Russian words. In the same speech he cited the struggle to consolidate the socialist community as the most important theme of the 24th Party Congress and he made no mention of Brezhnev's peace program. He warned against the danger of underestimating "ideological diversions of the class enemies" and clamored for greater political vigilance and the cultivation of "hatred for our foes." So much for the spirit of detente!

34. The danger of ideological subversion from the West became a continuing theme in Shelest's speeches. His tactics were plain--to parry, by veiled hints of ideological laxness and political blindness in Moscow, attempts by his critics to pin him with the label of an Ukrainian nationalist. He studiously refused to suggest that there might be any problem with nationalist sentiment in the Ukraine itself. Instead, by surrounding himself with a halo of ideological rectitude, he sought to put his critics on the defensive, and by concentrating on general ideological problems he also sought to extend his own appeal beyond the Ukraine.

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

35. In June, Shelest again stressed the importance of unity in the socialist camp and referred approvingly to the blow dealt "rightist" elements in Czechoslovakia in 1968. It was his remark on defense that was the most jarring, however. He dusted off the favorite argument of Soviet doves--that a nuclear war would mean the destruction of all civilization--but turned it around to use it as an argument for a still stronger defense establishment to deter would-be aggressors. He spoke only a few weeks after the simultaneous US and Soviet announcements of plans to reach a limited SALT agreement. Brezhnev's lengthy defense in mid-June of the wisdom of negotiation with the US seemed intended in part as a riposte to Shelest and others of his persuasion.

36. At the end of the month, after Brezhnev's statement in a speech in East Berlin that Moscow was ready to see the Berlin negotiations succeed, Shelest again sounded a sour note designed to revive old fears of the Germans. In a speech at a Soviet-Bulgarian friendship meeting he remarked that although more than 25 years had passed, "We cannot forget, we have no right to forget the perfidious acts of the German fascists--20 million dead..." The next day, he again warned of the danger presented by the spread of hostile ideology, of bourgeois views and morals.

37. One of the most intriguing events of the fall was Shelest's trip to East Germany in early October. Rather strangely, he went under the auspices of the Supreme Soviet, rather than in his party role, and spent considerable time with retired party boss Walter Ulbricht. Given Shelest's frequently expressed suspicions of the policy of rapprochement with West Germany and Ulbricht's known distaste for the trend in Soviet foreign policy represented by the just-concluded Brezhnev-Brandt meeting, the visit was bound to raise eyebrows. Whatever may have been said in private, Shelest's public statements were above reproach, with the possible exception of a loaded remark about the need to fight "intrigues" that threatened to divide their two countries, "no matter where they may come from." Polyansky was the only

-14-

SECRET

25X1

SECRET

25X1

politburo member on hand to see the Ukrainian party boss off to East Berlin and to greet him on his return, a reminder that the two have many ties and that Polyansky's support for Brezhnev is not unconditional.

Brezhnev Push Generates Political Tensions

38. The fall of 1971 witnessed marked gains in Brezhnev's authority and in the expressions of support for the policies with which he had become increasingly identified. In fact, the possibility arose that Brezhnev might be exaggerating the danger of his conservative opposition--at least that posed by Shelest's continued attacks--as justification for further building up his own position and as an instrument in obtaining the politburo's approval of his policies every step of the way. In mid-October, the politburo, not the central committee, announced approval of the draft five-year plan. This reversal of established practice seemed to undercut the public role of the central committee in considering and approving the plan. In the brief official report the stress on raising living standards as the main task came through with particular force, partly because of the brevity of the statement, but also because of the unequivocal wording.

39. Brezhnev's trip to France in late October was the high point of his long campaign to be recognized as the Soviet spokesman for detente. Shortly after his return, a joint decision of the politburo, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the USSR Council of Ministers was published, approving his activities in France and dubbing the visit an "act of great international importance." Not only did this statement serve to enhance Brezhnev's authority, but, like the earlier politburo approval of the plan, it worked to narrow the range of permissible public dissent for critics like Shelest, tying them down to an officially approved line.

40. At the end of October, it was announced that the Supreme Soviet would convene on 27 November to give final approval to the plan. The central committee routinely meets before sessions of the Supreme Soviet, and rumors began to circulate that

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

significant changes in the leadership would be announced that would mark new political gains for Brezhnev. The conspicuous absence of Voronov from the 6-7 November anniversary celebrations reinforced the impression that his days on the politburo were numbered and that his removal might open the way for other readjustments in the leadership that seemed to have been prepared for at the party congress but not carried out.

41. The success of Brezhnev's maneuvers, however, seems to have provoked a reaction from some of his colleagues who were concerned that any further gains by the party boss would put their own positions in jeopardy. During the period before the plenum, Kosygin and Suslov, the two most influential "independents" on the politburo, were increasingly prominent. Most remarkable, however, was the assertiveness of Shelest during this period. Shelest's activities suggest that he may well have sensed that he would be one of the first to go in any move to readjust the membership on the top ruling organs. The seating of the two leading Ukrainian officials on the fifteen-man politburo continued to be the most glaring anomaly of all the personnel actions taken at the party congress. Shelest appears to have been determined to fight for his position.

Shelest the Spoiler

42. In two speeches immediately before the November plenum, Shelest seemed to go all out to exploit vulnerabilities in Brezhnev's position. Shelest also appeared to be seeking to make common cause with other conservatives, particularly Belorussian party boss Masherov, to reach this end. Shelest continued to divert attention from his own quasi-nationalist stand in the Ukraine by hammering at the dangers of ideological laxness--by implication in Moscow--and for the first time broadened his attack on Brezhnev to include a jab at the two major planks--more consumer goods and detente--in Brezhnev's platform. He also lashed out at the activities of bourgeois Ukrainian emigres, accusing

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

them of collaborating with Zionist groups, and renewed his warnings of the dangers in the "imperialists'" efforts to subvert the socialist countries.

43. For the first time he directly attacked the attention given to consumer welfare, echoing the warning voiced earlier by Masherov against "vulgar" attitudes of "consumerism." While the entire leadership had assumed responsibility for the plan, it was Brezhnev alone who publicly played up the consumer aspect and, astonishingly for an experienced Soviet politician, failed to cover himself in his report to the congress by appropriate admonitions against the dangers of "consumer attitudes." Adding insult to injury, Shelest implied that Brezhnev was promising more than he could deliver in the consumer goods program. Masherov followed the next day with a second moralistic attack on "consumer attitudes," and seemed to be taking issue specifically with Brezhnev's unfortunate choice of words at the congress in referring to the need to "saturate" the market with consumer goods.

44. In the past, the Ukrainian and Belorussian party organizations were rivals for power in Moscow, and their party chiefs were more often than not on opposite sides of policy disputes. But their closely synchronized attacks on Brezhnev's policies on the eve of the plenum suggested a coalition in the making, at least on some issues.

45. In his most contentious ploy, Shelest stated that the draft of the five-year plan had recently been reviewed by the politburo and would be submitted for review by the next plenum of the central committee. This formulation ignored the publicly announced approval already accorded the plan by the politburo and implied that there was still room for change in the draft by the central committee. Once again, he misrepresented the "main task" which he presented as the "priority development of the industries determining technical progress." He seemed, in fact, perilously close to appealing to the central committee over the heads

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

of his politburo colleagues for a change in economic priorities. If he actually believed there was any chance at this late date of forcing some adjustments in the plan, he was to be disappointed. But as a trouble-making diversion, his actions may have been partially successful.

46. The two-day central committee plenum held at the end of November 1971 had the look of a stand-off. Brezhnev dominated the proceedings as he had on all past such occasions. He gave a major report on foreign policy which presumably included a general outline of plans for the meeting with President Nixon--announced in mid-October. He also summed up the debate on this report, as well as the debate on the plan and budget report--the only other main item on the agenda. His policies, both domestic and foreign, were endorsed, but the plenum resolution on the latter suggested some reservations on the part of the drafters. Furthermore, no personnel reassessments were made, and the central committee failed to accord him the high degree of personal acclaim that he had been receiving from the media in connection with his excursions in the foreign policy field. Soviet sources are now saying that Shelest was criticized at the plenum for his handling of Ukrainian affairs, particularly the problem of local nationalism. This may be true, judging from the subsequent attention to this issue, but it is clear that at that time Brezhnev still was not strong enough to deal decisively with Shelest.

Winter in the Country

47. In mid-December 1971, following the central committee plenum, members of the leadership fanned out across the countryside to address regional party meetings on the decisions of the plenum. While they touched upon a range of subjects in their talks, including economic questions and specific local problems, the main purpose seems to have been to explain the current line on foreign policy as outlined in Brezhnev's report.

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

43. The leadership has resorted to this sort of whistle-stop tour on a number of occasions in the past in an effort both to ensure that sensitive and complex policy issues are understood by the party rank and file and as a means of getting a feel for local sentiment. Given the controversial nature of the detente policy, the Moscow leaders may have been particularly anxious this time to carry the word to the local level.

49. All members of the politburo and secretariat participated in the briefing campaign, with the notable exception of Ukrainian party boss Shelest. Ordinarily he would have been expected to report to Ukrainian party workers on the plenum decisions. But in an unprecedented move apparently designed to deny him this platform, President Podgorny was sent down from Moscow to do the honors. His colleagues in Moscow may have assumed that Podgorny, because of his Ukrainian heritage and his past association with Shelest, would be the most acceptable emissary to send, but the reports in the Ukrainian newspaper of Podgorny's visit suggest that he received a distinctly cool reception.

50. From then on Shelest's speeches, at least as published, stayed away from foreign policy questions or other controversial issues. He appeared to have been muzzled, at least in public for the time being. Curiously enough, Belorussian party boss Masherov continued his attacks on Brezhnev's policies in even stronger language than before, carrying on where Shelest left off before the plenum. In a speech at an ideological conference in Minsk in early February 1972, Masherov, for the first time, joined his earlier complaint against "consumерism" with a harsh attack on the West and the ideological threat it represents--just as Shelest had in November.

51. Masherov, however, differed with Shelest on one important issue, the nationality question, thus setting important limits to their cooperation. Consistent with his ideologically militant mind-set, Masherov sharply attacked the "poison weed" of

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

nationalism and urged that greater strides be made toward the goal of drawing all the peoples of the Soviet Union together. Masherov appeared to be responding to the note sounded by party theoretician Suslov, who had stressed the same points in his report to the social sciences conference in December. Suslov's treatment of the nationality question, coupled with his attack on dogmatism--which appeared in the same speech--seemed to be aimed at Shelest and his like.

52. Other events during the same period suggest an even more serious attempt by Brezhnev and his allies to silence Shelest or at least turn the edge of his harping on the danger of consorting with the West against him. First there were charges in the central press in early December of laxness on the part of Lvov officials toward nationalist manifestations in their bailiwick. These accusations were followed by the sudden arrest of more than 20 Ukrainian intellectuals in Lvov and elsewhere on charges of nationalist activities. The arrests were part of a nation-wide roundup of dissidents that appears to have been carried out on the orders of the KGB in Moscow.

53. As mentioned earlier, Shelest had consistently sought to play down the problem of nationalist sentiment in the Ukraine.

25X1

25X1

The charges against the Lvov officials must have been particularly embarrassing to Shelest, as he had just presented the Order of Lenin to Lvov, accompanying it with words of unstinting praise for all aspects of work in the city.

54. During the winter of 1971-72 there was also evidence that Brezhnev was trying to counter Shelest's appeal to other conservative elements in the country. When members of the politburo traveled out to the provinces to report on the November plenum, Brezhnev spoke not only in Moscow

-20-

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

but also in Leningrad. During his four-day visit to the latter city, Brezhnev was clearly intent upon overcoming the hostility of Leningrad officials to him personally and to gain their support for his policies by all the means at his disposal.

55. Judging from both the fragmentary coverage of his visit in the press and from remarks made subsequently by a Leningrad official to US Embassy personnel, Brezhnev praised the Leningraders' initiative in setting up production associations. He also approved their initiative in drawing up a complex economic and social plan for the development of the city and apparently promised to support the extension of this concept of integrated planning to other cities. These efforts in behalf of the Leningraders were reportedly appreciated, and Brezhnev's standing in the city seems to have risen accordingly.

56. Brezhnev's actions provide an example of the kind of concessions he could make, and has apparently been willing to make, to conservative elements to win their support without in any way going back on his main policies of detente or his commitment to consumer interests at home. His gestures to the Leningraders also seemed to be designed to appeal to the Belorussians. They, like the Leningraders, combine an interest in progressive innovations such as complex planning, with an ultra-conservative stand on foreign policy questions and ideological matters in general.

57. There were of course many risks for Brezhnev, and external events, in particular, could have presented him with serious problems at home. He was in an exposed position on the issue of detente, having assumed public responsibility for this policy; he needed some tangible successes. The ratification of the FRG-USSR pact by the West German Bundestag was of particular importance to him. His entire European policy and considerable personal prestige were riding on ratification. Moreover, Shelest's ability to hold out against

25X1

SECRET

SECRET

25X1

Brezhnev suggested that his views were shared by other important members of the leadership who distrusted Moscow's present course and were standing by, hoping that it would fail.

German Treaties Break the Jam?

58. The misgivings about detente that had simmered all along in the leadership could only have intensified following President Nixon's speech on 8 May. The difficulty of Brezhnev's position was plain. Vietnam developments confronted him with a dilemma: how to proceed with the summit while maintaining the Soviet Union's image as defender of its allies and the interests of international communism. He was the more uncomfortable because, at the same moment, the West German treaties were in jeopardy. There were rumors that Shelest argued that the summit meeting should be called off. These reports have not been confirmed, but the evidence suggests that some sort of showdown within the leadership must have come to a head, or at least threatened, by 15 May.

59. Brezhnev reacted by reaffirming the commitment to hold the summit and calling the central committee into session beforehand to endorse his negotiating stance. This victory for the detente forces doubtless paved the way for Shelest's demotion. The significance of 15 May is suggested by the fact that on that day, after a month-long hiatus in press commentary on the summit, Pravda printed brief TASS announcements of US preparations for the trip. Lead articles in Izvestia on 16 May and Pravda on 17 May explained and justified Moscow's policy of peaceful coexistence, its devotion to finding political solutions to international crises, and the importance it attached to developing relations with the US.

60. It was probably on or about 15 May that the decision to call a central committee plenum on 19 May was made. Soviet Ambassador to Romania and central committee member Drozdenko returned from

SECRET

25X1

SECRET

25X1

vacation in the USSR to his post in Bucharest shortly before 14 May, suggesting that the decision did not come out of the politburo meeting of 10 May. Drozdenko went back to Moscow on Thursday, 18 May.

61. Although these circumstances suggest that the key decisions were made about the 15th, the activities of the leaders during this period do not indicate that a formal politburo meeting was held. The fact that summit preparations were never halted perhaps means that Brezhnev arranged to keep them going, with concomitant press treatment, in informal consultation with his colleagues in Moscow. Arrangements for the plenum might have been handled in a similar fashion.

62. Meanwhile, on 15 May the executive committee of the opposition Christian Democrats in West Germany voted to support the all-Bundestag resolution. This action, despite some backing and filling in Bonn on the 16th, cleared the way for the Bundestag to pass the Eastern treaties on 17 May. Passage of the treaties could not but bolster Brezhnev's position. It meant that the best moment for an all-out challenge to Brezhnev had passed. The Soviet leader may well have seized this opportunity to confirm the summit schedule and to reinforce his own position.

63. Politburo members resident in Moscow and those from out of town appeared at an anniversary celebration for the Pioneers on Thursday, 18 May, the usual day for politburo meetings. The only leaders missing were Voronov, still in Warsaw, and KGB chief Andropov. (The latter, however, was in Moscow on the 18th.) Final agreement was presumably reached by this group concerning the course of the central committee plenum the next day. The plenum heard a report by Brezhnev on the international situation. It expressed full approval and endorsement of its contents and the actions of the politburo in carrying out the Soviet "peace program." At the plenum, Boris Ponomarev was named a

SECRET

25X1

SECRET

25X1

[redacted]

candidate member of the politburo. He is a long-time party secretary and chief of the central committee's international department that helps form foreign policy and handles relations with Communist parties outside the Soviet bloc. The plenum also approved the appointment, announced on 21 May, of Ukrainian first secretary Shelest to the far less important post of USSR deputy premier. Only four days later Shelest's demotion was completed when Ukrainian Premier Shcherbitsky was named to replace Shelest in Kiev.

64. Brezhnev had a fresh mandate on the summit from his fellow politburo members and the central committee. He also was able to deliver a blow against his most outspoken critic on domestic and foreign policy. Appearances suggest that throughout this period he maintained the upper hand in Moscow and kept just far enough ahead of his critics to prevent his hand from being forced.

65. The convening of the plenum reflected Brezhnev's concern that his flanks were protected. The November 1971 plenum had set the course for the summit, and another meeting was not required for this purpose. Plenums are normally convened after important occasions to hear and approve the leadership's interpretation of their outcome. It is ironic that the only precedent in recent years for the May 1972 central committee plenum was in May 1960 in quite similar circumstances, but with a very different result. Then, as now, a summit meeting was in the offing, but the U-2 incident on 1 May caused a storm within the leadership and handed conservative elements a golden opportunity to check Khrushchev. At a central committee meeting held a few days after the US plane was downed, a hard-line conservative, Frol Kozlov, was elevated to a key position in the leadership, and Khrushchev was subsequently forced to torpedo the Paris summit.

66. The list of speakers on Brezhnev's report of 19 May was obviously drawn up with extraordinary care. The list was stacked with Brezhnev supporters, such as Armenian party boss Aliyev, and political

SECRET

25X1

SECRET

25X1

non-entities, such as the presidents of the Ukrainian and Kazakh science academies. Grechko also spoke at the plenum and presumably warmly endorsed Brezhnev's policies. Normally, Shelest and other important regional leaders would have spoken, as they did at the November plenum. Most significant, for a leadership that has always held that the appearance of unity is a vital necessity, the demotion of Shelest on the eve of the President's visit was a dissonant note. It suggests the degree to which Brezhnev felt the pressure of his critics and the need to use the opportunity to undercut them.

Many Winners

67. Brezhnev did not emerge by any means as the sole beneficiary. He seems to have accomplished Shelest's demotion only in alliance with other forces, which may thus have been able to enhance their own standing. In procuring endorsement of his detente policy and in weakening Shelest's position, Brezhnev cultivated his relations with other conservative groups, especially those represented by Grechko.

68. Another winner may be Suslov, senior party ideologist and foreign affairs expert. Ponomarev is probably Suslov's protege. Both men reportedly opposed the invasion of Czechoslovakia, which had been strongly pushed by Shelest, because of the resentment they knew it would arouse among other Communist parties. Suslov helped provide the ideological justification for the new opening to West Germany in early 1969. Thus, Ponomarev's promotion, although it would seem to bolster the commitment to detente, does not add to Brezhnev's personal strength. In fact, over the years Suslov has served as a principal independent power broker on the politburo and a defender of its collective features.

69. With Shelest side-tracked and the summit successfully completed, Brezhnev's conservative critics seem to be in retreat. The best evidence of this was the appearance of Belorussian party boss Masherov

SECRET

25X1

SECRET

25X1

at the Supreme Soviet hearings of 31 May on the treaty with West Germany to speak in favor of ratification. Masherov, who had previously echoed Shelest's warnings of the danger of dealing with the West, not only praised the treaty as a new step in the implementation of the "historic peace program," but paid lavish tribute to Brezhnev for his role in achieving it.

-26-

25X1

SECRET